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ABSTRACT

This document is written to provide school administrators with an additional resource for notifying parents and teachers when school-age children are illegally absent from school or class by using student aides in the attendance office to assist in locating students, contacting parents whose children are absent, and providing the necessary feedback to both teachers and parents. The method of student selection, the kind of training sessions used, the implementation of the program in a junior high school, and the results of the implementation are described. (Author)

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REDUCING TRUANCY BY USING STUDENT AIDES IN THE ATTENDANCE OFFICE

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ABSTRACT

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This document is written to provide school administrators with an additional resource for notifying parents and teachers when school-age children are illegally absent from school or class by using student aides in the attendance office to assist in locating students, contacting parents whose children are absent, and providing the necessary feedback to both teachers and parents. The method of student selection, the kind of training sessions used, the implementation of the program in a junior high school, and the results of the implementation are described.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Like many generations of students who preceded this era, and not unlike many that will follow, the reluctance of students to attend classes on a regular voluntary basis, prevails in the present. It was this kind of reluctance about which Shakespeare spoke when he explained, "Love goes toward love as school boys from their books"; and even though Mr. Shakespeare was born ahead of this generation, the problem of the unwillingness of many of today's young people to attend class regularly and enthusiastically is as real for our generation as it was for his.

This problem of truancy is becoming an ever-increasing challenge to educators who are seeking ways of dealing with illegal student absenteeism. In one country school in Prince George's County, for example, the absentee rate on some days soared as high as 207 out of a total student population of 847.

In a recent survey conducted by administrators at Bethune Junior High School to determine some of the major problems involving operational procedures in the schools of Prince George's County in general, and at the Mary McLeod Bethune Junior High School in particular, it was determined that one of the most vexing and time consuming problems was the responsibility for presenting feedback to teachers and parents on matters concerning truancy.

The fact that Prince George's County is operating under a program of court-ordered busing, compounds the problem. Many students who leave home to catch the bus never arrive at school.

A recently enacted Code of Student Conduct defines truancy as "the act of unauthorized absence or lateness to classes." The large numbers of students who are listed as absent from school, coupled with those who elect not to go to class or to report late, present for the administrator charged with attendance an awesome task, given his/her many other responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities involve establishing interpersonal relationships involving parents who often are simply seeking information regarding student/teacher rapport, resolving the conflicts of a difference in values on the part of the individuals involved, and counseling with students, parents, and teachers relative to issues of social and academic problems received through referral by staff members, parents, and/or through personal observation.

The administrator in charge of student attendance then faces a challenging responsibility; and although County policy requires that parents of children who are absent from school be notified only at the end of the third consecutive day, the administrator who chooses this course of action is "treading on very thin ice."

One parent, for example, was extremely distraught when she discovered that her truant daughter visited the home of a girlfriend (who was also skipping school), took a short-cut

home, and was "grabbed and nearly raped." Fortunately, according to this parent's account, the student managed to "kick, fight, and run away before serious harm was done." This parent reports, however, that the trauma of that experience "is still having its effects."

Teachers, too, voiced concern over the ever-increasing numbers of students who failed to report to school or to class and were discouraged at the lack of feedback concerning students who were apparently truant for the entire day or at least a part of it. This lack of feedback was often viewed as a lack of concern on the part of administrators. How best to deal with the problem is a matter of paramount concern.

Unfortunately, the school's administrators, often inundated with various reports and other correspondence, overwhelmed by conferences and administrative meetings, and overtaxed by excessive numbers of teacher referrals of students reported to the office for engaging in "inappropriate" behavior, were often unable to investigate each instance of student absenteeism.

Conferring and counseling with students, parents, and teachers relative to issues of social and academic problems through referrals by staff members, parents, or personal observation of student behavior; establishing wholesome interpersonal relationships involving parents who often are simply seeking information regarding student/teacher rapport or requests by students to intercede in their behalf regarding teachers they have judged to be unfair; and attending to managerial duties

such as student supervision during both curricular and extra-curricular activities impose additional restraints on the administrator's time.

Statement of the Problem

To emphasize the fact that administrators at junior high schools are often inundated with requests from both teachers and parents, deluged with allegations of unfairness by students and overwhelmed with complaints of insensitivity to the needs of each group is to profoundly understate the problem.

The junior high school experience is a unique one. Generally, it is a time marked by changes which are both physical and sexual. William Delaney, in a recent issue of The Washington Star, reveals that Dr. Joan Lipsitz of the Learning Institute of North Carolina argued in her book Growing Up Forgotten that "as a society, we have no coherent concept of adolescence. . . . Adults do not know what distinguishes the adolescent from the child and adult."[1]

In her study, Lipsitz is especially critical of junior high which, she says, has evolved into "an intermediate structure which puts the adolescent on 'hold' during years when we wait for him or her to grow up, feeling unsure or even hopeless about our instructive purposes. . . ."[2]

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[1]William Delaney, "Early Teens Are Growing Up Forgotten," The Washington Star, 15 February 1977, p. A1.

[2]Ibid., p. A6.

Boyd R. McCandless elaborates on this by explaining that, "In large part because he is sexually mature, society changes its attitudes toward him and its rules for him, so that he moves on to new social ground, both in and out of school. . . . He is different because he is not yet granted adult status."[3]

It is perhaps this "differentness" which accounts for the volumes of problems with which the junior high school staff is forced to deal. The junior high school age student is one whose frustration and aggression levels are extremely high (see figure 1) so that much counseling time and administrative action are spent resolving conflicts between two or more students.

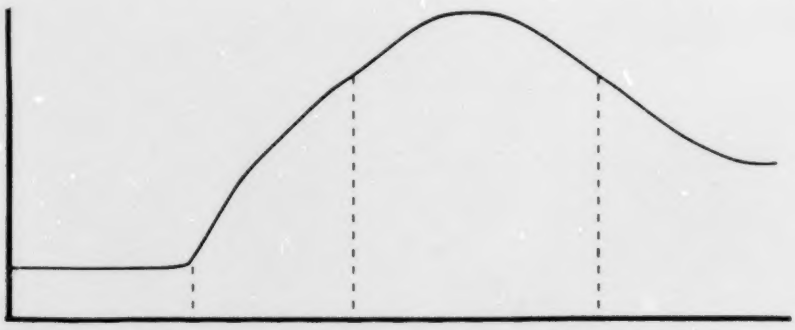

Fig. 1. Frustration and Aggression Levels

Because of the uniqueness of this special group of children with which we are dealing, and of the problems which

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[3]Boyd R. McCandless, Adolescents Behavior and Development (Hinsdale, Ill.: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1961), p. 1.

they experience as a result of being "different," both parents and school staff are often too busy simply trying to cope with the problems that these students bring to the learning environment to think through creative strategies that might prove successful in meeting some of these needs.

Junior high school staffs, although generally more extensive than those found in elementary schools, are still often staffed with personnel who have had no training in dealing with these "special" young people because the colleges simply do not make available this kind of training to them. Add to these facts certain other overt kinds of behavior which can lead to a total breakdown in school discipline, and the problem begins to define itself. Peer pressure is exceptionally strong during adolescence, and although Emerson in "Self-Reliance" may have been charmed by "the not me in my friend," students of junior high school age, more often than not, tend toward conformity to the same kinds of behavior as their peers. If class cutting is a popular thing to do in any given community, the tendency will be to cut class.

The problem then, summarily, is this: there is a need to have students in junior high attend school on a regular basis. When this does not happen, the behavior tends to be emulated, and the school finally finds itself faced either with a substantial number of students who are walking the halls, loitering throughout the building, disrupting classes which are in session, or failing to report to school at all.

Because the junior high school administrator is often engaged in varied functions such as helping to maintain order, disciplining students, working with teachers on matters involving the curriculum and teaching skills, there is little time left to pursue the problem of investigating truancy and then providing proper feedback to all the people involved.

The problem of notifying parents on a daily basis when their children are not in attendance, proved an overwhelming task for most County administrators. Although one principal, who is currently being sued for negligence in the death of a student who was killed while attempting to "hitchhike" because he failed to notify the parents that the child was not in school, was encouraged by the court's recent exoneration of a colleague in a similar case in his County. The implications are clear: parents need, some have expressed a need for, and almost all of them are interested in acquiring knowledge about their children's attendance patterns.

Teachers, too, were critical of the extent of and the consistency with which feedback was furnished them. Their efforts at adhering to the stipulation to grant make-up assignments to students who were legally absent from class or school as mandated by the County's Code of Student Conduct were being hampered by the inability of the administrative staff to furnish the feedback necessary to make a judgment.

Some attempt to respond to this vexatious problem was addressed by using parent volunteers; and although their willingness to assist in this regard was gratifying, other

responsibilities sometimes precluded their assistance on a consistent basis. These responsibilities involved consideration of the needs of their other children who were in the County's elementary or senior high schools or sometimes who were not yet in school at all, problems of transportation since the students in the schools were from different communities and some were bused as far as fifteen miles to school, changes in work schedules, and involvement in other family or civic responsibilities.

Despite the school's efforts at contacting each parent whose child was absent, the list of names of students who are absent from school, many legitimately so, is often so voluminous that the simple task of locating telephone numbers can of itself be a taxing and time-consuming job.

One contributing factor to this vexatious problem and one which has been the most difficult to resolve, has been the hostile parent--the "community school" advocate--who, angered by the court's busing mandate, has made little or no attempt to cooperate with the school in motivating students to see the value in attending school and/or class.

Closely allied with this reason, is the problem of the overly solicitous parent who feels the need to protect his child at all costs. Even when it has been evident that the parent was unaware of his child's absence from school, the charade goes on. If a parent continually defends and supports his child's non-attendance in school, there is little recourse left to the school other than the involvement of the office of Pupil Services, and as a last resort, an appeal to the courts.

In attempting to investigate problems of truancy and then to provide proper feedback to all the people involved, the junior high school administrator finds himself in an extremely difficult posture; and although all County teachers are requested to notify the office immediately when a student is absent from class, the personnel is not always readily available to make the necessary investigation.

If teachers are to feel supported and informed; if parents are to feel that the school is cooperating in attempting to resolve this problem; and if students are to develop into responsible citizens, consistent feedback to all parties concerned is an urgent part of the school's daily operational procedures.

Since school officials and teachers are legally responsible for maintaining control over all matters related to students who have been sent to school by their parents, and the possibility of a lawsuit charging school officials with negligence is en ever increasing threat, the importance of keeping parents informed cannot be overemphasized.

Finding the time to investigate the legality of all the student absences and reporting what dispensation was made of the cases involving violators to teachers and parents along with conferring by telephone with all parents whose children are listed as absent for the day is a time consuming and often an awesome responsibility. The dictates of the times in which we live, however, mandate that we find a way to respond effectively to this problem of illegal student absenteeism.

CHAPTER II

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRACTICUM

The objectives of the program were threefold and were defined as:

- The assumption that there would be a 20 percent reduction in truancy.
- The assumption that the parents of all students whose children were illegally absent from school and/or class would be notified of each instance of truancy.
- The assumption that all teachers would receive prompt feedback concerning the reasons for the student's nonattendance in class.

The first objective included not just illegal absence from school, but was expanded to include those students who had reported to school but who had become "selective" in the classes they chose to attend (see appendix A). To put it another way, a student who had been present every day during a given grading period, assuming that there are forty-five school days in the marking period, for example, may out of a total of seven classes each day attend two of them forty-three times, one of them forty-two times, one of them forty-four times, and have perfect attendance in all the others (see figure 2). The discrepancy is evident and often is indicative of the kind of sporadic attendance which may profile the record of a student with which the school has not found an effective way to deal. To reverse this trend by at least 20 percent was one of the anticipated outcomes of this program.

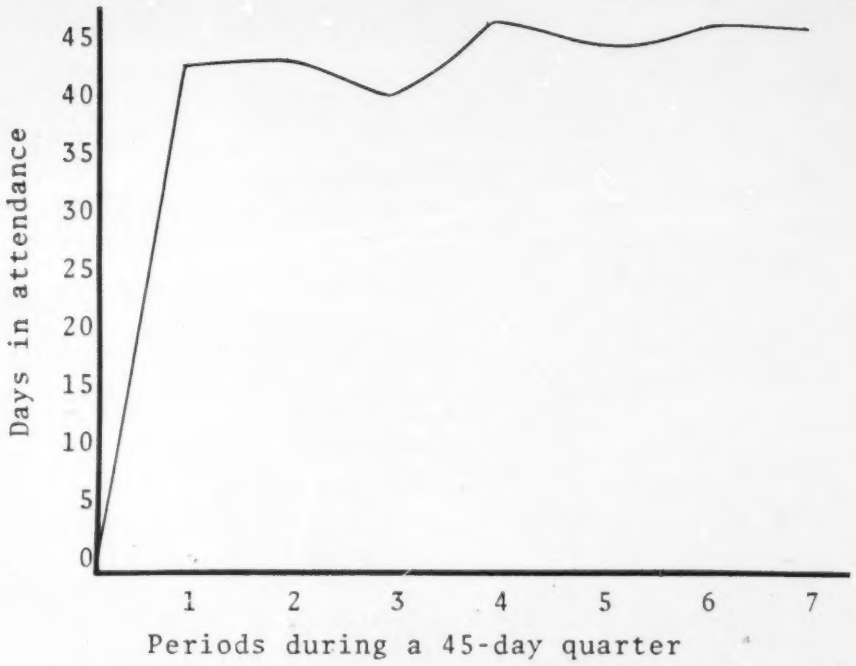

Fig. 2. This figure shows that the student was present every day during his fourth, sixth, and seventh periods, was absent twice during his first and second periods, three times during his third period, and only once during his fifth period.

The second objective, notifying parents, was more difficult to achieve than had been originally anticipated. The first problem had to do with the way students are initially scheduled. The information which the grade level guidance counselor receives from the parent is entered on a computer sheet (see appendix B) to be sent to the Instructional Data Systems office for processing. If any item is missing, the student is "flagged from the scheduling system" so that the attendance office does not have a record on file of the student's telephone number and this often makes it extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to make parental contact. Additionally, many schedules are returned to us incomplete.

Those items which can be excluded without affecting the student's registration include locker number, locker combination, bus number, bus stop, the student's and the parent's middle initial, and, unfortunately and more importantly, either a home or an emergency number or both. This makes it extremely difficult to contact parents and/or guardians.

Figure 2 more graphically illustrates the problem. In many instances, the discrepancies are much more pronounced. Simple expediency renders the idea of consulting the guidance office in every instance during the day when student aides are unable to locate telephone numbers unpalatable. Some parents' insistence on unlisted telephone numbers and incorrectly listed telephone numbers made the attempt to contact each parent whose child was illegally absent from school an extremely vexatious task. The student aides' willingness to type messages to parents and then send them out in the form of a certified letter produced some interesting revelations which will be discussed later in this document.

The third objective was the easiest to effect because it involved only reports on students who had reported to school, whose name did not appear on the absentee bulletin, but who failed to report to a given class later in the day. There generally would be one of three explanations:

. The student had been granted an early departure for the day. This possibility could be easily checked out by referring to a log in the nurse's office because she was generally the <u>one</u> person who was charged with this responsibility.

. The student had been placed on suspension. This report could be checked by conferring briefly with one of the two agents charged with student discipline; namely, the vice principal or the administrative assistant.

. The possibility that the student could be illegally absent from that class. In this case, student aides would check the guidance department, the health suite, and the library. Failure to locate students in one of these areas resulted in an "All Call."

The use of student aides to assist in various capacities has been a rewarding experience in many ways. An explanation of the strategy employed should reveal why.

CHAPTER III

STRATEGY EMPLOYED FOR MEETING THE OBJECTIVES

The search for a strategy in dealing with the twofold obligation of parent contact and feedback to teachers was given considerable attention. Nothing in the experience of the writer or in the review of the literature, held out as great a degree of effectiveness as did the use of student aides in the attendance office. There are at least five reasons which account for the belief that the use of student aides is a good strategy. They may be enumerated as:

1. The students were immediately available. Several of the strategies identified earlier, such as the use of parent volunteers, proved to be unsatisfactory. There is always the need to identify nonworking parents, to separate these into those who are willing to volunteer their services to the school and those who are not. Some parents are willing to come in one or two days each week, but this arrangement did not work out too satisfactorily because these parents often had to divide their day into many different parts. They were housewives, as has been said, and there were instances in which a more demanding situation made claim on their time. In an effort to allow for a degree of consistency, and to minimize the number of different callers, students were scheduled to work the same period each day.

This arrangement took into consideration the fact that all administrators, hall monitors, and the investigator/counselor were on hand to assure that students who were in the building at the beginning of the school day made it to their first period class. Another reason was that the absentee bulletin, typed from lists of names of students counted absent by their homeroom teacher, generally was compiled, typed, and distributed during the second period by one of the administrative student aides.

2. It offered an opportunity for broader educational experiences on the part of the student. Opportunities for improving their communication skills made the experience worth the time it took for this writer to train students to look up telephone numbers; to record appropriate messages for the administrator in charge of student attendance; and to write legible, concise messages to teachers in order to furnish them with the feedback necessary to fulfill their obligations to students, i.e., granting make-up work on the basis of the legality or illegality of the student absence in question.

3. It was an opportunity to more fully acquaint students with the operational procedures of the school. Students came to understand that adults in the school must also be governed by certain rules. It gave them a real sense of belonging. The roles often became reversed so that now there is an awareness of the realities and dilemmas which often face the school administrators and their awesome sense of responsibility for the students who come (or should come) to them each day.

4. The choice to use students as opposed to some of the other "available alternatives" seemed to allow for what Paul Nash termed "the reciprocal debt between the student and society." Nash explained this concept quite accurately in his assertion that:

> It is the responsibility of adults to make clear to the child his debt to society past and present; and to show him that it is through work that his debt is paid--honest, productive and useful work that in its turn will make a contribution to the health of society and so help to bring to fruition the potentialities of his unborn successors. An understanding of this reciprocal debt can do much to improve the individual's attitude toward his life work by helping him to perceive its significance and dignity.[4]

5. Students often have information about other students that adults do not have. They know, for example, the places students frequent when they are not in attendance at school. They also know which students left home to catch the bus and failed to do so, or which students caught the bus and failed to report to homeroom. They have a deep sense of kinship with students who feel alienated and isolated from adults and they can anticipate the fear, frustration, anger, hostility, and hopelessness much more readily than we can because these are emotions that adolescents continue to experience in a world that is still too complex for them. Gruhlke partially explains this feeling of alienation when she speaks about the detachment of the "Professional Educator . . . The most

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[4]Paul Nash, Authority and Freedom in Education (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966), p. 10.

frightening trait of teachers is the tendency to dehumanize their contacts with the kids. After years of being cooped up with kids everyday, they tend to become matter-of-fact in their treatment of the children, acting as if each child were nothing more than a piece of equipment on an assembly line."[5] Most children have not yet developed this cold detachment and are, therefore, able to say to his bewildered peers in ways that adults find it difficult to do, "We are calling to inquire about you because we care."

As educators, or as Professional Educators as Gruhlke elected to call them, we often overlook one of our greatest resources--the student himself. It is, I believe, our obligation to see to it that students develop fully and that in employing them in areas such as communication with fellow students, as well as with adults with all the exposure which this responsibility will foster, we lead them toward stronger and more positive self-concepts. Robert and Isabel Hawley were right:

> Where the individual can see himself engaging in socially significant work, and where the individual can see himself as responsible to himself and to others as a result of that work, he learns to value himself and his ability. He becomes self-motivated.[6]

The school misses a very real opportunity to contribute toward the enrichment of the human condition when it exercises

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[5]Verna King Gruhlke, To Hell With the Kids (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1971), p. 87.

[6]Robert C. Hawley and Isabel L. Hawley, Human Values in the Classroom (New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1975), p. 89.

the prerogative of overlooking the very valuable opportunities it has of dealing with the whole child. He is, according to Douglas H. Heath, given an opportunity to separate his "safer academic intellectualized pursuit from the experiential." Heath further supports this argument with his insistence that "a person must have something to do that ties him to reality and that organizes his time and effort for some long term purpose. Work can be an act of transcendence through which we externalize our hopes, talents, and knowledge in something outside ourselves."[7]

The use of student aides to contact parents whose children are absent from school, to write simple messages to teachers providing them with feedback on the dispensation of cases involving student truancy, and to help in locating students who are not in class was the strategy used to resolve this problem.

In addressing the problem of reducing truancy and presenting feedback to teachers and parents, junior high school students at the pilot school were given an opportunity to work under the supervision of guidance counselors, the school librarian, the school nurse, the vice principal, and the newly appointed administrative assistant.

Their tremendous efforts to perform successfully awakened in each of us an awareness of the potential for

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[7]Douglas H. Heath, Humanizing Schools--New Directions, New Decisions (New York: Hayden Book Co., Inc., 1971), p. 70.

success in helping to resolve some of the school's most pressing problems.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY FOR CARRYING OUT THE STRATEGY

The school's guidance department was very actively involved in identifying students who were not only interested in serving as student aides, but who could also benefit from the experiences of rendering service to their school while profiting from the experience either financially or academically. Only two criteria had to be examined before students could be considered for the position of student aide to the administration. Both were established by the "In-school Youth Employment Program of Prince George's County." This is an agency which finances student participation in the schools' work-study programs. According to guidelines established by the "Youth Employment Agency," only students who were from families whose incomes fell below a certain level were eligible for participation. The second stipulation was that each participant had to be at least fourteen (14) years of age.

This procedure afforded counselors a more expedient way to effect student selection, but it did not alleviate the problems such as the number of students interested in assuming the same kinds of responsibilities as those experienced by the student aides, but who failed to meet the income and/or age qualification requirement.

The students who participated in the program were selected by the coordinator of the school's work-study program

upon the recommendation of the school's guidance department. Another positive aspect of the program was the attempt to attract potential dropouts and the opportunity to encourage young people who might conclude their education at the end of their junior high school experience. The caliber of students who were interested in serving in the program did not particularly include only the school's brightest scholars. These individuals ran the gamut from students who were experiencing academic and/or social adjustment problems (sometimes along with economic ones) to those who simply needed the challenge which this opportunity could afford.

To exclude any of these students seemed discriminating at best; and so a means was sought for including students who were neither exceptionally young nor exceptionally poor. In conferring with the school's guidance department, it was learned that students who had attained ninth grade status could be scheduled to work for two hours during the regular school day and receive credit in this "elective" area.

The apprehension experienced was that friction may develop between students who worked for pay (see the explanation above regarding the In-school Youth Employment Program of Prince George's County) and students who worked for academic credit. Gratifyingly enough, this friction did not develop.

In an effort to accommodate as many students as possible who were truly interested in working and who qualified, the school arranged to use those students who were working for credit on a rotating basis.

The vice principal assisted in training the student aides in several areas in order to assure efficient performance in the administration of the assigned tasks. The identification of the areas of student performance was a top priority. What kinds of tasks were student aides requested to perform? The tasks assigned students included sorting out the absentee forms,[8] arranging them in proper order according to homeroom numbers, typing the absentee bulletin for distribution by the second period, and delivering to each teacher a bulletin listing the names of all students who did not report to homeroom. Beginning with the second period, students who reported for work were required to check the absentee bulletin beginning with the seventh grade, look up telephone numbers (which are located on file in the attendance office), and call each parent whose child was listed as absent for the day.

Students who had established a pattern of truancy had their card "red-lined"[9] and their parents were contacted first. For purposes of easy detection, an alphabetical list of students who had been identified as persistent truants was compiled as a reminder to the student aide and placed on file with the month's daily attendance bulletin. The names of those students would also be placed in a "priorities" basket so that the appropriate action could be taken. A list was also made of

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[8]These are forms on which each homeroom teacher records the names of students who are absent during homeroom.

[9]A simple red line was drawn across the top of the attendance card with a magic market for easy identification.

students whose parents could not be contacted for some reason. For example, some students had telephones that had been disconnected, some students had unlisted numbers, and some had no telephones at all.

For these students, a form letter was composed, and those parents were sent a certified letter often typed by one of the student aides. Teachers cooperated fully in the effort. The ninth grade English teacher completed a unit, not just with the aides but with all her students, on oral communication skills. As a former English teacher, the writer reviewed some of these skills with qualifying eighth graders who had been selected to participate in the program.

The typing teacher was not only helpful in developing typing skills; she also encouraged the development of pride in the students' work. When parents had to be sent original letters informing them of their child's sporadic or non-attendance at school, she always checked margins and letter form and spelling--and for once, she relates, the students didn't resist. They wanted <u>their</u> letters to be perfect for the appropriate administrator's signature.

The student aides also became very skilled in the use of the school's copying machines and in using the school's public address system for contacting specific rooms to check a student's presence or absence in class so that appropriate messages could be given to parents or to teachers. During alternate periods, a different student aide would attempt to contact parents whose children were listed on the absentee

bulletin. If the student were unable to locate a phone number necessary for personal contact, he would complete a copy of the form letter which was sent by certified mail, and file the duplicate copy for future reference.

If no record of the student's registration could be found, the student's name and homeroom section would be recorded, allowing school officials an opportunity to investigate the student's status, i.e., to determine if the student belonged to our school.

In order to monitor the student's time and progress, two kinds of instruments were constructed. The first was a "time" sheet to check such areas as punctuality and regularity at the post of duty; and the second was a proficiency form to monitor the number of varied kinds of jobs performed during that period, with what degree of proficiency and a kind of information log to help the administrator prioritize the duties for the remainder of the day regarding what tasks were not completed, which parents and/or teachers appeared most anxious, annoyed, irate, or concerned based on feedback from student aides. Other areas to be rated included ability to complete the task and dependability.

The idea of devising a written test had initially been proposed. However, in an effort to approximate as closely as possible a real "work situation," the idea was abandoned. The selected approach of using student aides, it was felt, offered students the type of experience which could prove successful in connecting the learning gained in the classroom to the student's

ability to function as a contributing member of society. J. Bascom St. John presented as good a rationale as any when he asked rhetorically, "How about a kind of schooling in which students are exposed to a body of 'real' experience?"[10]

If contacting the home failed to improve the situation, Paul I. Hill suggested alternatives such as helping the child plan a schedule "that enables him to get up, eat breakfast . . . and still arrive at school on time."[11] We believe our plan is working, however, and one of the reasons was the persistence of the student aides and other staff.

If, after three consecutive days of attempted parental contact, the school is unable to reach the parent or guardian by telephone, a certified letter (as mentioned above) is mailed to parents informing them of the number of days the student has been absent. If the letter is returned to the school, an investigation is conducted by the Office of Pupil Accounting to determine legitimacy of residence. Reporting forms were designed so that student aides would be able to provide much of the requested feedback in an acceptable manner. Many times, however, the student was on his own for giving a legitimate or an appropriate response.

Perhaps the greatest learning experiences occurred on the part of administrators and teachers. Students whose success in school had been marginal and sometimes nil began to respond in ways that were surprisingly positive. Students in the

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[10]J. Bascom St. John, "Priorities in Education," Education Canada 11 (December 1971): 37-41.

[11]Paul I. Hill, "Truancy," in Solving Behavior Problems (U.S.A.: F. A. Owen Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 26-27.

program enrolled in classes like typing so that their messages could be neater and "more professional." They succeeded in compiling, typing, and distributing an absentee bulletin by the end of the first class period; and they wrote complete informative messages to the teachers regarding students who were absent from school and/or class.

But the sheer joy of the program was the pleasure of walking down the halls and observing students, who had been so turned off, actually smiling at a vice principal or stopping to hurriedly remind, "Don't forget, I get to work for you next year." It would be less than candid on the part of this writer, or less than realistic on the part of the reader, to try to foster the contention that there were no impediments, no opposition, no attempted restrictions--in brief, no hindrances. There were at first aborted attempts to discourage student participation, perhaps because of fear of the unknown, and of these attempts it must be said that what the students said and did saved the operation for us in most instances.

Perhaps an eighth grade student who had made a grammatical error on the telephone when contacting a parent and who had felt that the program was going to be jeopardized because of this, looked at three of us in the "administrative wing" of the building and sadly but emphatically reminded, "Everybody makes mistakes," and then philosophically continued, "but I guess you can only be excused if you're 'grown,' though." It was a sobering thought.

Surprisingly, however, instances of this kind were few and the staff and parents were far more receptive to the idea than had been anticipated. Parents have articulated their appreciation for the school's increased efforts to keep them informed about their child's attendance in school. Additionally, many potentially embarrassing moments were averted by the school's ability to respond intelligently and informatively in instances when parents have made specific inquiries about their children's attendance record. The fact that the student code of conduct recognizes the problem of truancy as one which warrants the attention of the County as a whole, lends validity to the efforts that the school is making in this regard.